

TEACHING PLAN FOR ACTION LEARNING

Skills to preteach before Presentations

1. Selecting a group to work with. What criteria for choosing people to *work* with successfully, not to play with. Children need practice at selecting their own groups for different purposes. (NB - usually you will get one or two groups that you as a teacher disapprove of (composition wise) - just stand back. It is a learning experience, and very valuable. It doesn't help in the long term to protect children from the consequences of their choices.)

2. Brainstorming for what is already known, and identifying the gaps in this knowledge. Give plenty of practice modelling as a class, and then working in groups. Once children have brainstormed, they need to organise their findings in such a way that it becomes clear where the gaps are, what they *don't* know. This now becomes the focus area for their research questions.

3. Coming up with their own questions. As part of everything you do for the next month or so, work with the question matrix at your elbow - reading, unit work, maths, health issues It must become clear to the children that questions from the top left are small questions, with unimportant answers - factual, and straight recall. Consciously get yourself (and the children) working on the probability, prediction and imagination lines in particular. The answers to these questions will be far more interesting, creative and important.

4. Identifying useful sources of information, and knowing how to access them. As part of everything you do, brainstorm the possible places you could find information - remember some of them will be specific to the information you seek. Make sure all the children in your class know how to access these. (Check video fast forwarding, scanning newspaper, using the OPAC computer in library, using the index in library books, using CD Roms in Learning Centre.) It would pay to have at least three or four sessions of learning to scan pages of information in order to locate material of interest, and to skim down paragraphs. It is simply not productive use of time to read everything on a page. Specifically teach the process of fining down, and broadening out, a search.

5. Selecting information and recording it: Make as many opportunities as you can to jot down notes (model this), make quick sketches, jot down key words. In particular, they need to be taught how to take a page of information (perhaps photocopied), highlight key words and phrases, and then to jot down the main points. It is really useful at this stage to use a graphic organiser. Perhaps start with information you give orally, then move on to written information. (Make sure there is plenty of surplus non-essential stuff, so they learn how to identify the *key* information and ignore the rest.)

6. Processing the information - analysing and evaluating it: This is the hardest part of all - teaching children how to think about what they have found, and to discover relationships in the information. They need to be taught to think about it in a highly structured and logical manner, and also in a creative and divergent way - both of these approaches are vitally important. The children will need to be shown how to classify and categorise what they have found, separate out ideas, group and put things in order (perhaps by time, or category), to come up with hypotheses, and draw conclusions, and make suggestions.

7. Organising and creating a way to communicate their findings: Once all the information has been collected, put together, and conclusions and ideas have resulting from examining their findings, everything needs to be put together in such a way that it communicates their message to their chosen audience. Preteaching will need to be specific to the way this communication will take place. If it is to be seminar form, they need to be shown how to make cue cards (as for formal speeches) so that they do not merely stand up and read to an audience. Body language, gesture, volume, eye contact also needs to be discussed. If they are to use the OHP, cover layout, conventions, layers, using a pointer etc. If they are to use a slide show, they must have completely mastered the technique first. If posters, look at layout, balance, colour, purpose etc. It is a really good idea to model seminar delivery first, so that the children know exactly what is expected of them.

8. Practising the evaluation process: Children need practice at evaluating against specific criteria, and only those criteria - otherwise evaluations become wild, woolly and waffly. Lay out ground rules - eg one encouraging positive statement, then specific feedback in a way that makes helpful suggestions for improving performance. They need a lot of direction and shaping in order to fine tune their skills at this.

Pitfalls to watch out for!!

- * Inappropriate expenditure of time and energy. For example, colouring in and doing fancy headings on cue cards, that noone is ever going to see! Use as a teaching point with whole class. Or, too much time on a chart, not enough on what they will say.

- * Inappropriate frills and furbelows. For example, making a cake and sharing it round the class as part of seminar - it has nothing to do with the topic and simply is not appropriate - pays to use this as an example first!

- * Groups not being ready for the deadline. You need to be fair and consistent in setting a date and sticking to it, and that means making sure you give children the school time needed. If you regularly conference each group, and monitor progress, and insist that they deliver on the given date, no matter what, they'll get the message! They are accountable to you and the rest of the class. Failures are an important part of learning!

- * Wonderful presentation, low quality content. You as the teacher must constantly question, probe and challenge in order to get beyond the superficial.